

AN AUTUMN LOVE CYCLE

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THE SAME AUTHOR

HEART OF A WOMAN

Verse

BRONZE

Verse

BLUE BLOOD

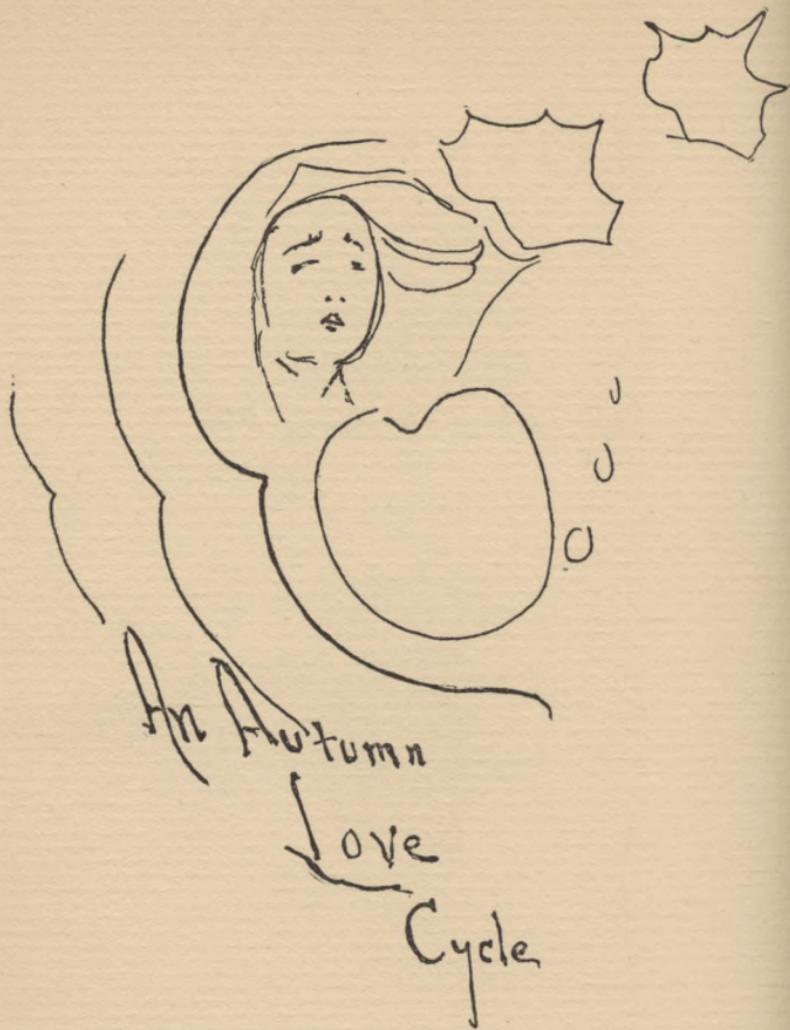
A One Act Play

PLUMES

A One Act Play

THE TORCH

*Epitome of Epigrammatic
Remembrances*



From a sketch by
EFFIE LEE NEWSHOLME

AN AUTUMN LOVE CYCLE

Georgia Douglas Johnson



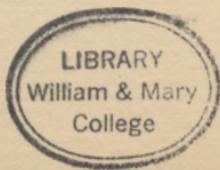
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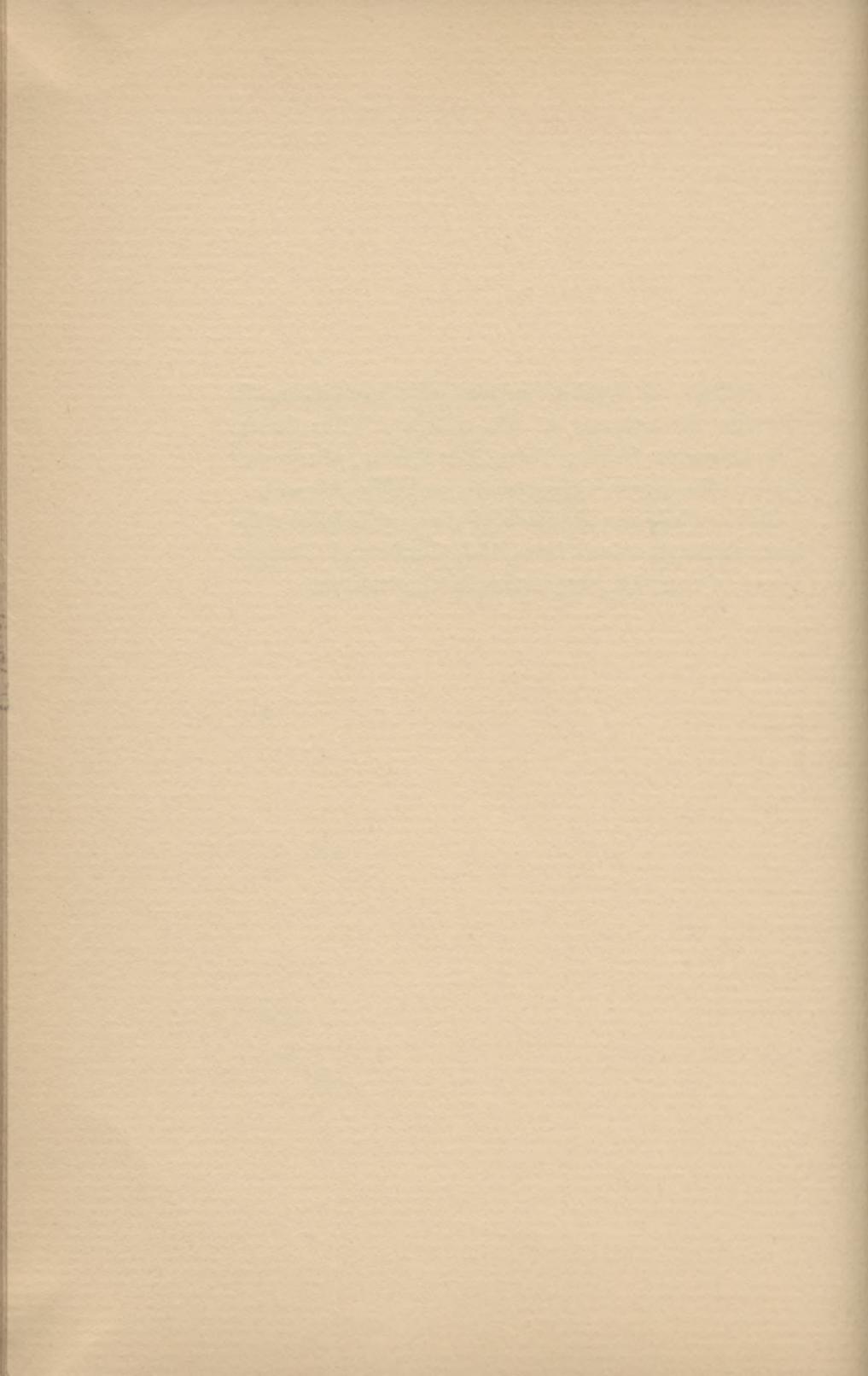
*whose appreciation, encouragement
and helpful criticism have
so heartened me*

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Acknowledgment is made of the very helpful criticism and suggestions from Alain Locke and Clement Wood in the final preparation of this volume.



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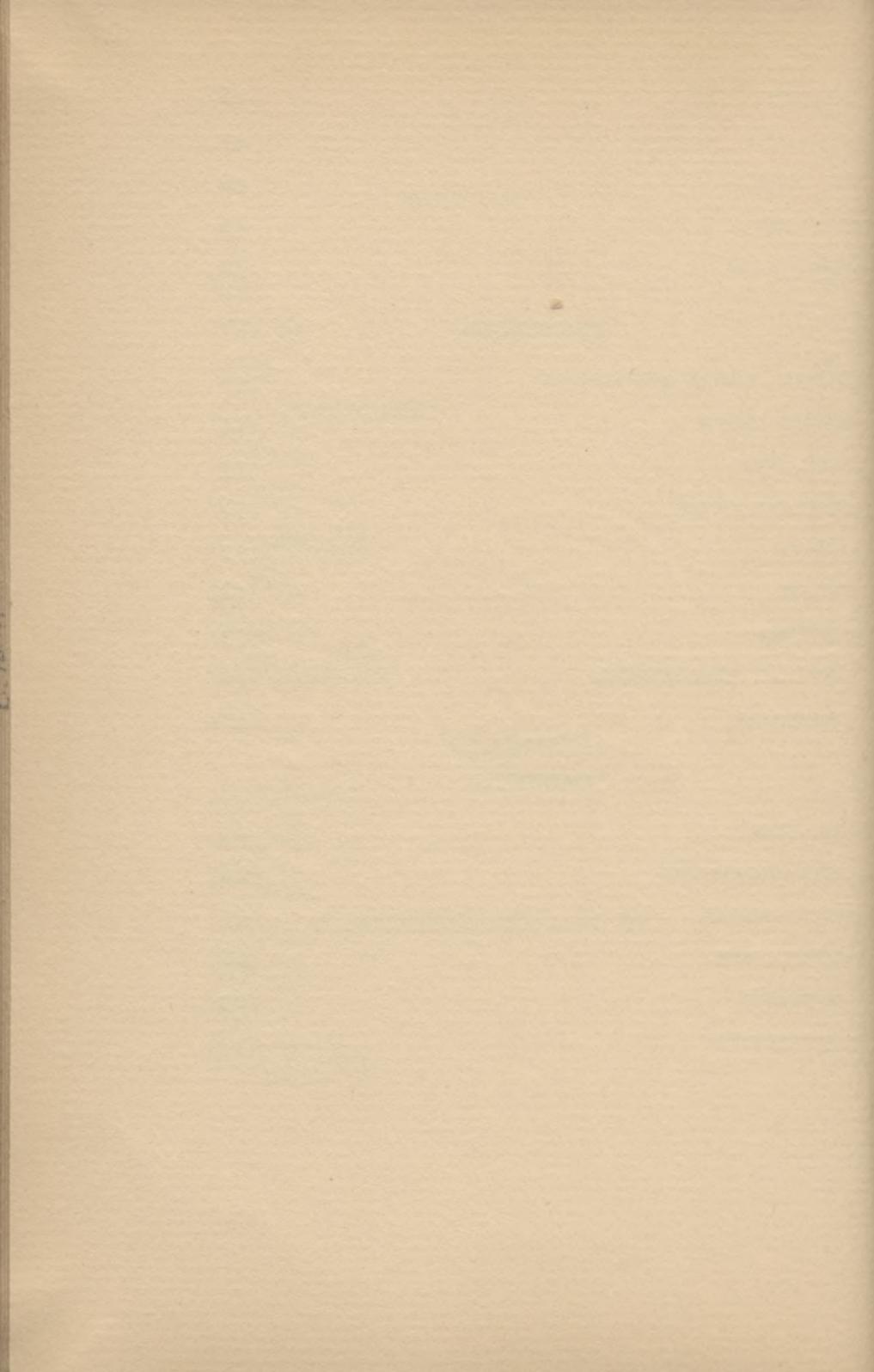
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FOREWORD

In the title of her first volume, "THE HEART OF A WOMAN and OTHER POEMS," Georgia Douglas Johnson chose with singular felicity, indeed with the felicity of instinct, her special domain in art. And as she proceeds with maturing power and courage of expression in this third volume, it becomes all the more apparent that the task which she has set herself is the documenting of the feminine heart. Any poetic expression of life from this point of view that achieves a genuine authenticity and sincerity of emotion is as welcome as it is rare. For the emotions of woman, time-old though they be and hackneyed over as in a sense they really are, are still but half expressed. They have yet to be carried beyond the platitudes and the sentimentalizations of a man-made tradition. Yet in the wholesome stripping off of mediaeval

brocades and the laces of classic conceits, it has often occurred to us to question whether the imposition of futurist patterns and the cubist cut of the current intellectual modes has given us any more vital or adequate a revelation of the flesh and blood figure of the "eternal feminine." "Clothes are but clothes," as Carlyle would say: modern feminist realism has but overlaid the vitally human with another convention, and interposed another cloak. How long shall we make a sphinx of woman, who herself now yearns to throw off along with the mystery, the psychological vestments of disguise. Our author puts it pointedly in "Paradox,"—

Alas! you love me better cold
Strange as the pyramids of old
Responselessly . . .
So, like a veil, my poor disguise
Is draped to save me from your eyes'
Deep challenges.
Fain would I fling this robe aside
And from you, in your bosom hide
Eternally.

Voicing this yearning of woman for candid self-expression, Mrs. Johnson invades the province where convention has been most tyrannous and inveterate,—the experiences of love. And here she succeeds where others more doctrinally feminist than she have failed; for they in oversophistication, in terror of platitudes and the commonplace, have stressed the bizarre, the exceptional, in one way or another have overintellectualized their message and overleapt the common elemental experience they would nevertheless express. Mrs. Johnson, on the contrary, in a simple declarative style, engages with ingenuous directness the moods and emotions of her themes.

Through you I entered Heaven and Hell
Knew rapture and despair.

Here is the requisite touch, certainly for the experiences of the heart. Greater sophistication would spoil the message. Fortunately, to the gift of a lyric style, delicate in touch, rhapsodic in tone, authentic in timbre, there has been added a temperamental endowment of ardent sincerity

of emotion, ingenuous candor of expression, and, happiest of all for the particular task, a naïve and unsophisticated spirit.

By way of a substantive message, Mrs. Johnson's philosophy of life is simple, unpretentious, but wholesome and spiritually invigorating. On the one hand, she belongs with those who, under the leadership of Sara Teasdale, have been rediscovering the Sapphic cult of love as the ecstasy of life, that cult of enthusiasm which leaps over the dilemma of optimism and pessimism, and accepting the paradoxes, pulses in the immediacies of life and rejoices openly in the glory of experience. In a deeper and somewhat more individual message, upon which she only verges, and which we believe will later be her most mature and original contribution, Mrs. Johnson probes under the experiences of love to the underlying forces of natural instinct which so fatalistically control our lives. [Especially is this evident in her suggestion of the tragic poignancy of Motherhood, where the consummation of love seems also the expiation of passion, and where, between the antagonisms of the dual role of

Mother and Lover, we may suspect the real dilemma of womanhood to lie.]

Whatever the philosophical yield, however, we are grateful for the prospect of such lyricism. Seeking a pure lyric gold, Mrs. Johnson has gone straight to the mine of the heart. She has dug patiently in the veins of her own subjective experience. What she has gleaned has been treasured for the joy of the search and for its own intrinsic worth, and not exploited for the values of show and applause. Above all, her material has been expressed with a candor that shows that she brings to the poetic field what it lacks most,—the gift of the elemental touch. Few will deny that, with all its other excellences, the poetry of the generation needs just this touch to make it more vitally human and more spontaneously effective.

ALAIN LOCKE.

Washington, D. C.

THE CYCLE

I CLOSED MY SHUTTERS FAST LAST
NIGHT

I closed my shutters fast last night,
Reluctantly and slow,
So pleading was the purple sky
With all the lights hung low;
I left my lagging heart outside
Within the dark alone,
I heard it singing through the gloom
A wordless, anguished tone.
Upon my sleepless couch I lay
Until the tranquil morn
Came through the silver silences
To bring my heart forlorn,
Restoring it with calm caress
Unto its sheltered bower,
While whispering: "Await, await
Your golden, perfect hour."

FOOTSTEPS

Passing ever, early, late,
No fond footsteps seek my gate,
But down the winding road they wend
To some other journey's end.

Yet,—I would not have them wait
Here within my guarded gate,
Certain footsteps I shall know,
And for them I listen low!

OH NIGHT OF LOVE

Oh night of love, your rapt ecstatic hours
Were mine, the languor of their pale perfume
Pervades me, kisses in a fountain-fire,
Surround me,—fetter and consume.

Oh night of love, your groves of strange content
Project a thralldom over coming days;
Exalted, derelict, and blind I wend
Unmindfully along Life's misty ways.

AUTUMN

Believe me—when I say
That love like yours, at this belated hour,
Overwhelms me,—
Stills the fount of thought!
I move as one new-born—
And strange to swift transitions
As from my prison door
I gaze
Into a blinding sunlight!

THRALLDOM

Your voice keeps ringing down the day
In accents soft and mild,
With which you have beguiled
And wooed me as a child.

Your presence bounds my every way
And thrills me in its fold
With phantom hands that hold
Like cherished chains of gold.

SEPARATION

Within your pulsing day
There must be little space
For visions of my face
To lure your thoughts away.

Yet, I would have it so,
To bear alone the pain
That saddens love's refrain.
Pray God you never know!

LOVE'S MIRACLE

So like a boundless, soundless sea
The miracle of love to me,
With all the world a rosy dream
Sailing upon a silver stream,
While I, a fairy in mid-air,
Am dancing, dancing everywhere.

Hark! do you hear the thunder peal?
I care not what it would reveal,
Tomorrow will be yesterday
When I am shivering and gray:

I will not heed the prompter's ring
Let others answer, I shall sing
And dance the merrier—away!
I'll live and live and live—today!

PROVING

Were you a leper bathed in wounds
And by the world denied,
I'd share your fatal exile
As a privilege, with pride.

You are the very sun, the moon,
The starlight of my soul,
The sounding motif of my heart
Its impetus and goal!

INTERIM

The days lie dark between our jeweled meetings
Like wintry burials.

My heart bows low before the cheerless hearth
Until your voice rings through the gloom
And bids me
Wake!
And live!

GOOD-BYE

Let's say "Good-bye"
Nor wait Love's latest breath
Poised now so lightly on the wing of Death,
While yet within our eyes one fervent gleam
Remains to hallow this, a passing dream:
Yes, yes "Good-bye,"
For it is best to part
While Love's low light still burns
Within the heart!

A PARADOX

I know you love me better cold
Strange as the pyramids of old
Responselessly.

But I am frail, and spent and weak
With surging torrents that bespeak
A living fire.

So, like a veil, my poor disguise
Is draped to save me from your eyes'
Deep challenges.

Fain would I fling this robe aside
And from you, in your bosom hide
Eternally.

Alas! you love me better cold
Like frozen pyramids of old
Unyieldingly?

HOW MY HEART SINKS

How my heart sinks when I behold the sad reflection of my face,
A wan and wistful wound, with oh, such meagre grace;
How can you hold me dear withal and conjure charms withdrawn.
Or does the Autumn twilight hold a charm unknown to dawn?

Hold! Do not speak! some day perchance, I'll read the message dire
Within the ashes of the flame, the aftermath of fire,
Ere then perhaps I shall have found the highways of the soul
Where one may read uncrucified, the blood-words of the scroll.
Till then, uphold illusion's veil before my gaze the while
That I may gather strength to fuse from agony, a smile!

TO TIME

Day by day the threads of white
Multiply, Oh! hour-glass!
How passing swift your bright sands pass,
Fain would I hold you,
Linger, bide
Until these surges shall subside,
That sweep me forward unto bliss,
Oh! charging sun, I bid you rest,
Break not your arrow in my breast!

WELT

Would I might mend the fabric of my youth
Which daily flaunts its tatters to my eyes,
Would I might compromise awhile with truth
Until love's moon, now waxing, wanes and dies.

For I would go a further while with you
And drain this Cup of Joy so passing fair,
Which meets my parching lips like cooling dew
'Ere time has brushed cold fingers through my
hair.

REVIEW

I fear my power impotent
To hold you leal and full content,
Some hapless look or word perchance
Dispels the glamour of romance;
I tremble lest some stranger fair
Arrest you,—cause you to compare
The meagre charms which I possess
With some resplendent loveliness.

How far removed from Youth's command
The trembling sceptre in my hand,
As miserly within the glass
I mark Love's fleeting hours pass.

ILLUSION

Oh! for the veils of my far-away youth,
Shielding my heart from the blaze of the truth;
Why did I stray from their foldings and grow
Into the sadness that follows—to know.

Impotent atom with desolate gaze
Treading Life's treacherous, intricate maze—
Oh for the veils, for the veils of my youth,
Shielding my heart from the blaze of the truth!

PARODY

You came,
The tapestries of love
Were shining in the sun,
My wishes settled down content
About you as you stood.
I looked into your cryptic eyes
And thought I understood;
But no,—
The splendor of your gaudy robe
Grew dimmer day by day,
I wondered,
Searched within my soul to seize the mystery.
The answer staggered me,
Aghast,
Like one at bay,
I gazed with open eyes of thought upon you,
God! 'twas true—
A mockery, a parody,
Had come to me—in you!

DELUSION

You gave me your hand,
I held it to be
The last word, the dear word,
The soul's entity;
I cherished it, treasured it,
Only to find
I held but a gauntlet—
That I had been blind!

SUNSET

And now—

As one who closes up the house and goes uncaring
where

He may forget the scenes of home 'mid foreign
climes and air,

I bar the chamber of my heart and seal the past
within

To wander down the city's road amid the whirr
and din.

The long years seem impassable, the morning has
no smile,

With naught behind these barring doors and
nothing else worth while,

Like some lone pilgrim without hope, I stumble
on my way,

Who lifts no futile plea for sun, but asks for
clouds less grey.

FINIS

I looked death calmly in the face
And placed my hand within his hand
And said:
"Come, come, let us away
For I have lost the magic key
Opening the portals of desire—
My wishes cumber in the dust,
And life is stagnant
in
my
heart!"

CONTEMPLATION

IVY

I am a woman
Which means
I am insufficient
I need—
Something to hold me
Or perhaps uphold.
I am a woman.

JOY

There's nothing certain, nothing sure
Save sorrow. Fragile happiness
Was never fashioned to endure;
For joy repels the perfect claim
And answers to no certain name;
How furtively we scan the mist
Perchance amid the gloom to find
Some moments rare and rapture-kist

ONE DAY

Good-bye dear day of sunshine, rain
In flooding torrents pours
Its liquid footsteps on my roof,
Its fingers on my doors.

While I sit tranquilly within
And tell my beads of joy,
Holding a peace within my heart
Which nothing can destroy.

ATTAR

Fire—tears—
And the torture-chamber,
With the last maddening turn of the screw—
Only thus
Is one precious drop distilled
Of the attar of rose
Of the heart.

YOUTH'S PROGENY

Oh the sad little dreams of the dim yesteryear
Lying cold, still and stark in the dust of their
 bier,
How the heart hurries back, all the long weary
 way,
Just to bid them good-night at the close of the
 day.

I WONDER

I wonder—

as I see them pass unheeded down the way,
(The women who were once beloved, imperious
and gay)

Holding with frail, pale hands the cup
Of Life's discarded wine
If memories
Are bliss enough
To make the dregs—divine!

VALUES

All the pretty baubles spread
Are not the answer to my need,
These tinselled trappings but beguile
This journeying, while deep within
A want unspeakable resides,
That throbs and throbs unceasingly,—
So hungering,—no banquet spread
Can tempt it, and no golden wine
Make it forget: I balance it—
The world flies upward in the scale!
Always, unsoothed, unquieted,
It aches and aches across the days
And sears the nights that sum my life.

ARMAGEDDON

In the silence and the dark
I fought with dragons;
I was battered, beaten sore
But rose again;
On my knees I fought still rising
In my pain:
In the dark I fought with dragons.
Weary tears
Cease your flowing,
Even now the dawn appears!

LE SOIR

Mute-lipped—

 unquestioning grim-visaged Fate,
I cleave the shadows toward the Western Gate;
And yet—

 my lagging heart still holds
Mute-arms outstretched
Unto earth's gleaming folds.

Who knows?

 perhaps Hope's blossoms spray
In lush profusion
O'er the edge of day!

TREASURE

What matters though love's dream shall pass,
Since from the throbbing hour-glass
One golden-throated moment prest
Its attared incense to my breast.

Since I have known the purple gleam
That lifts above me—can I deem
The way unlighted—when I go
Encircled by love's afterglow?

RETROSPECTION

After all—

mine is the joy
Which naught can lessen or destroy.
For love has led my flying feet
Where immortelles are springing sweet,
And everlasting skies of gold
Are memories, when earth is cold
And though our future paths should lie
Estranged, as star-ways, through the sky,
I shall not look reproof, nor find
Within this pass a charge unkind,
And lightly sorrow shall be met
For I can never know regret.

INTERMEZZI

SPRINGTIME

Again it is the vibrant May,
The bursting buds, the leafing trees,
The fragrant, undulating breeze,
Call to my heart in subtlest way:
Come! Come! it is a holiday.

The streamlet with unending song,
Beneath its silver veil of mist
Seems flowing, flowing, to some tryst,
While I—with inner surges strong,
Find incomplete the day, and long.

DESTINY

I know my love is seeking me
As restless rivers seek the sea,
Across the nights, across the days
That snare the intervening ways.

I know my love is seeking me
As Time must seek Eternity,
When nights are very still I hear
His footsteps, coming, coming near!

ENVOYS

Love calls me tonight
In the beat of the rain
Through the cold little drops
On my bare window-pane;
Calls and calls through the dark
Like a whispered refrain
Tapping soft on my heart
Through the bare window pane.

I WANT TO DIE WHILE YOU LOVE ME

I want to die while you love me,
While yet you hold me fair,
While laughter lies upon my lips
And lights are in my hair.

I want to die while you love me
And bear to that still bed
Your kisses—turbulent, unspent,
To warm me when I'm dead.

I want to die while you love me
Oh, who would care to live,
'Til love has nothing more to ask
And nothing more to give.

ECSTASY

Not less than this, beloved,
This beaming, highmost ray
That sweeps in royal splendor
Across our perfect day.

Not less than this,—far rather
That we should say “adieu,”
With every rose in Eden
Abloom for me and you.

PLEDGE

With kisses I'll awake you love
So tenderly at morn,
The pledges of my fealty
Diurnally reborn.

We'll thread life's way together love,
And when the fading light
Dips softly over western hills
I'll kiss your eyes good-night.

YOUR EYES

Your eyes—
Dark pools, so calm and deep,
A thousand ages in them sleep,
A dreaming world within them lies,
And all my hopes
Of paradise!

AMOUR

Kiss me!
And let the hours bloom triumphantly
Before life's little sun has set
And I am old.

Love me!
The day is fleet
And I . . .
Am far too passionate
To die!

FINALITY

When love's triumphant day is done,
Go forward! leave me to the night
Beneath the coldly staring stars,
The waiting winter and its blight.

For I would never hold the heart
That mutely quivers to be free,
Unfurl your restless wings—away!
And leave the emptiness to me.

IN LOVE

I lived in Hell the other day
Its fires wrapt me angrily,
But now their horrors fall and fade
Like ghosts that memory has made.

I lived in Hell even today,
How swift the fierce flames die away—
Submerged with kisses, I forget,
With tears upon my pillows yet.

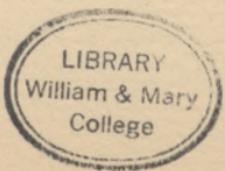
FICTION

Ah! love!
I shall not seek to penetrate
Your webbed gauze
Nor tease my heart
By queries deep,
But hold you tenderly;
The day is evening,
And I must cull my flowers
'Ere dark.

DEAD DAYS

Dead days of rapture and despair
I would your hours exhume,
Renew their wildness once again
Their rigors and perfume.

PENSERO SO



BREAK, BREAK MY HEART

Break, break my heart
For love is done,
The pale light trails the dying sun—
And night awaits—no hope—no stars
Darkness
Hide my scars!

LITTLE KING

From worshipping I now arise
Stunned and aghast, with open eyes
I see the real, the little you
I thought so gallant, brave and true.

A pity yet is mine, I fear,
Since wherefore comes this falling tear,
For none among your fawning throng
Will love you well, nor love you long.

ROMANCE

When I was young

I used to say:

Romance *will come* riding by
And I shall surely smile
And play with him awhile.

When I grew older

then I said:

Romance *may come* riding by
I wonder shall I smile
And play with him awhile?

But now—

Alas! I only say:

Romance *never will* come by
And I shall never smile
He has been dead the while!

FALLING GODS

Confusion, desuetude and gloom,
The travailing of sound,
Fell desolation in my soul,
And agony profound;
The gods are falling heavily
And for all time to be,
And never more my heart shall know
A shrine to Deity!

ARMOR

You cannot hurt me any more
For I am armored now
And I can look into your face
With cool, unfevered brow.

The tranquil river meets the sea,
My life flows on at rest,
Unurged, untorn, but oh, my God!
I love the old way best!

DIVIDE

Your lightest breath may fan my cheek
Your whisper stir me when you speak,
And yet—
The teeming planets play
Between your heart—and mine
Today.

RETURN

Now,
Like the pines intoning
Though some solitary gloom,
My errant thoughts go pattering
About love's ancient tomb,
And though no breath of incense rare
Lies round the shattered cup,
A banquet weird, the fragments
Where the ghost of love
May sup.

SONG OF THE SINNER

Just a bit of ashes
Grey, grey ashes—spent—
God! how fierce the fires burned
Down to this content.

Just a bit of ashes,
Not a single spark
Lives in this residuum
Crumbling cold and dark.

Just a bit of ashes—
To the judgment day,
I go with my memories—
Pray, sweet virgin, pray!

CELIBACY

Where is the love that might have been
Flung to the four far ends of Earth?
In my body stamping around,
In my body like a hound
Leashed and restless—
Biding time!

CADENCE

OFFERING

I seek no token of you dear
I only ask to give
The purple flower of my heart
And you will let it live.

I ask no fealty or plight,
I only pray that you
May find earth's barren places bright
Perhaps, because it grew.

And when for you the final sun
Moves toward the darkening West,
I shall be lingering to place
Love's flower on your breast.

ESTRANGEMENT

Some day I shall be dead, and pride
Which kept me from your feet,
Shall be the burden of the song
My cold lips shall repeat.

And some day when you too shall find
A pillow in the sod,
Would you then spurn an hour with me
Above—where daisies nod?

RECESSIONAL

Consider me a memory—a dream
That passed away,
Or yet, a flower that has blown and shattered—
In a day;
For passion sleeps, alas, and keeps no vigil
With the years,
And wakens to no conjuring
Of orison or tears.

Consider me a melody
That served its simple turn,
Or but the residue of fire
That settles in the urn,
For love defies pure reasoning
And undeterred flows
Within—without
The vassal heart!
Its reasoning—
Who knows?

SEPULCHRE

I have mounded the corpse of my sorrow
And wreathed it with roses fair
That none who may pass on the morrow
May know what lies buried there.

CURTAIN

When one has lived
'Tis not so hard
To fold the hands,
To say, "Good-night,"
And creep away
Behind the dark;
But 'tis not strange
The heart rebels
When sounds of night
Ring down the day
That was a weary, joyless way
From early dawn
To setting sun:
How eagerly we trail the light
For crumbs of happiness we fend,
And struggle, struggle—to the end!

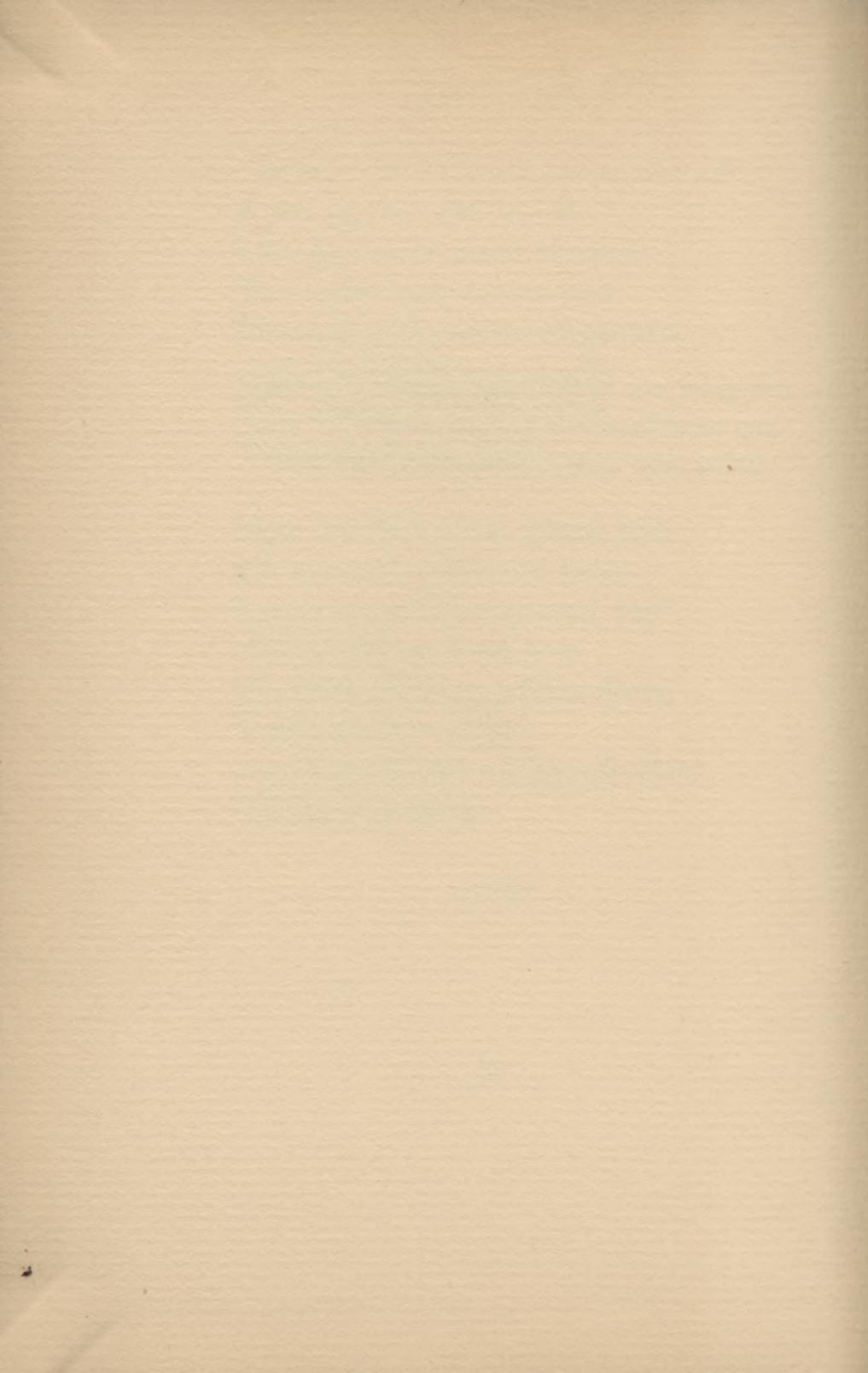
AFTERGLOW

Through you I entered heaven and hell,
Knew rapture and despair,
I flitted o'er the plains of earth
And scaled each shining stair:
Drank deep the waters of content,
And drained the cup of gall,
Was regal and was impotent,
Was suzerain and thrall.

Now, by Reflection's placid pool
On evening's mellowed brow,
I smile across the backward way
And pledge anew my vow;
For every glancing, golden gleam,
I offer gladly—pain!
And I would give a thousand world
To live it all again!

FINIS

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